

Ecclesiastes

קהלת

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Ecclesiastes

Chapter 1

The words of Koheleth a Probably "the Assembler," i.e., of hearers or of sayings; cf. 12.9-11. son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Utter futility!—said Koheleth— Utter futility! All is futile!

What real value is there for a man In all the gains b So Rashbam. Heb. 'amal usually has this sense in Ecclesiastes; cf. Ps. 105.44. he makes beneath the sun?

One generation goes, another comes, But the earth remains the same forever.

The sun rises, and the sun sets— And glides c So Targum; cf. Bereshith Rabbah on Gen. 1.17. back to where it rises.

Southward blowing, Turning northward, Ever turning blows the wind; On its rounds the wind returns.

All streams flow into the sea, Yet the sea is never full; To the place [from] which they flow The streams flow back again. d According to popular belief, through tunnels; so Targum and Rashi.

All such things are wearisome: No man can ever state them; The eye never has enough of seeing, Nor the ear enough of hearing.

Only that shall happen Which has happened, Only that occur Which has occurred; There is nothing new Beneath the sun!

Sometimes there is a phenomenon of which they say, "Look, this one is new!"—it occurred long since, in ages that went by before us.

The earlier ones are not remembered; so too those that will occur later e Lit. "will not be remembered like..." For 'im meaning "like," cf. 2.16; 7.11; Job 9.26. will no more be remembered than -e those that will occur at the very end.

I, Koheleth, was king in Jerusalem over Israel.

I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun.—An unhappy business, that, which God gave men to be concerned with!

I observed all the happenings beneath the sun, and I found that all is futile and pursuit f Lit. "tending," from root ra'ah, "to shepherd." of wind:

A twisted thing that cannot be made straight, A lack that cannot be made good.

I said to myself: "Here I have grown richer and wiser than any that ruled before me over Jerusalem, and my mind has zealously absorbed wisdom and learning."

And so I set my mind to appraise wisdom and to appraise madness and folly. And I learned—that this too was pursuit of wind:

For as wisdom grows, vexation grows; To increase learning is to increase heartache.

Chapter 2

I said to myself, "Come, I will treat you to merriment. Taste mirth!"

That too, I found, was futile.

Of revelry I said, "It's mad!" Of merriment, "What good is that?" I ventured to tempt my flesh with wine, and to grasp folly, while letting my mind direct with wisdom, to the end that I might learn which of the two was better for men to practice in their few days of life under heaven.

I multiplied my possessions. I built myself houses and I planted vineyards.

I laid out gardens and groves, in which I planted every kind of fruit tree.

I constructed pools of water, enough to irrigate a forest shooting up with trees.

I bought male and female slaves, and I acquired stewards. I also acquired more cattle, both herds and flocks, than all who were before me in Jerusalem.

I further amassed silver and gold and treasures of kings and provinces; and I got myself male and female singers, as well as the luxuries of commoners—coffers. The Heb. *shiddah* occurs only here in the Bible; in the Mishnah it designates a kind of chest. and coffers of them.

Thus, I gained more wealth than anyone before me in Jerusalem. In addition, my wisdom remained with me:

I withheld from my eyes nothing they asked for, and denied myself no enjoyment; rather, I got enjoyment out of *b Septuagint* and a few Heb. manuscripts have "(in exchange) for"; cf. 2.24; 3.13, 22; 5.17. all my wealth. And that was all I got out of my wealth.

Then my thoughts turned to all the fortune my hands had built up, to the wealth I had acquired and won—and oh, it was all futile and pursuit of wind; there was no real value under the sun!

c The order of the two sentences in this verse is reversed in the translation for clarity. For what will the man be like who will succeed *d* Change of vocalization yields "me, and who is to rule"; cf. vv. 18-19. the one who is ruling —d over what was built up long ago? My thoughts also turned to appraising wisdom and madness and folly.

I found that Wisdom is superior to folly As light is superior to darkness;

A wise man has his eyes in his head, Whereas a fool walks in darkness. But I also realized that the same fate awaits them both.

So I reflected: "The fate of the fool is also destined for me; to what advantage, then, have I been wise?" And I came to the conclusion that that too was futile,

because the wise man, just like *e* See note on 1.11. the fool, is not remembered forever; for, as the succeeding days roll by, both are forgotten. Alas, the wise man dies, just like —e the fool!

And so I loathed life. For I was distressed by all that goes on under the sun, because everything is futile and pursuit of wind.

So, too, I loathed all the wealth that I was gaining under the sun. For I shall leave it to the man who will succeed me—

and who knows whether he will be wise or foolish?—and he will control all the wealth that I gained by toil and wisdom under the sun. That too is futile.

And so I came to view with despair all the gains I had made under the sun.

For sometimes a person whose fortune was made with wisdom, knowledge, and skill must hand it on to be the portion of somebody who did not toil for it. That too is futile, and a grave evil.

For what does a man get for all the toiling and worrying he does under the sun?

All his days his thoughts are grief and heartache, and even at night his mind has no respite. That too is futile!

There is nothing worthwhile for a man but to eat and drink and afford himself enjoyment with his means. And even that, I noted, comes from God.

For who eats and who enjoys but myself? f Some mss. and ancient versions read mimmennu, "by His doing."

To the man, namely, who pleases Him He has given g Lit. "wisdom and knowledge and enjoyment." the wisdom and shrewdness to enjoy himself; -g and to him who displeases, He has given the urge to gather and amass—only for handing on to one who is pleasing to God. That too is futile and pursuit of wind.

Chapter 3

A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven: a I.e., all human experiences are preordained by God; see v. 11.

A time for b Lit. "giving birth." being born -b and a time for dying, A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted;

A time for c Emendation yields "wrecking...repairing"; cf. 1 Kings 18.30. slaying and a time for healing, -c A time for tearing down and a time for building up;

A time for weeping and a time for laughing, A time for wailing and a time for dancing;

A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones, A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces;

A time for seeking and a time for losing, A time for keeping and a time for discarding;

A time for ripping and a time for sewing, A time for silence and a time for speaking;

A time for loving and a time for hating; A time for war and a time for peace.

What value, then, can the man of affairs get from what he earns?

I have observed the business that God gave man to be concerned with:

He brings everything to pass precisely at its time; He also puts eternity in their mind, d I.e., He preoccupies man with the attempt to discover the times of future events; cf. 8.17. but without man ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass.

Thus I realized that the only worthwhile thing there is for them is to enjoy themselves and do what is good e I.e., what the author has already concluded (2.24) is good. in their lifetime;

also, that whenever a man does eat and drink and get enjoyment out of all his wealth, it is a gift of God.

I realized, too, that whatever God has brought to pass will recur evermore: Nothing can be added to it And nothing taken from it— and God has brought to pass that men revere Him.

f Meaning of parts of verse uncertain. What is occurring occurred long since, And what is to occur occurred long since: and God seeks the pursued.

And, indeed, I have observed under the sun: Alongside justice there is wickedness, Alongside righteousness there is wickedness.

I mused: "God will doom both righteous and wicked, for g Shift of a diacritical point yields "He has set." there is -g a time for every experience and for every happening."

f Meaning of parts of verse uncertain. So I decided, as regards men, to dissociate them [from] the divine beings and to face the fact that they are beasts. h Contrast Ps. 8.5-6.

For in respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: as the one dies so dies the other, and both have the same lifebreath; man has no superiority over beast, since both amount to nothing.

Both go to the same place; both came from dust and both return to dust. Who knows if a man's lifebreath does rise upward and if a beast's breath does sink down into the earth?

I saw that there is nothing better for man than to enjoy his possessions, since that is his portion. For who can enable him to see what will happen afterward?

Chapter 4

I further observed a Cf. 3.16. all the oppression that goes on under the sun: the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them; and the power of their oppressors—with none to comfort them.

Then I accounted those who died long since more fortunate than those who are still living;

and happier than either are those who have not yet come into being and have never witnessed the miseries that go on under the sun.

I have also noted that all labor and skillful enterprise come from men's envy of each other—another futility and pursuit of wind!

[True,] The fool folds his hands together b I.e., does not work; cf. Prov. 6.10; 24.33. And has to eat his own flesh.

[But no less truly,] Better is a handful of gratification Than two fistfuls of labor which is pursuit of wind.

And I have noted this further futility under the sun:

the case of the man who is alone, with no companion, who has neither son nor brother; yet he amasses wealth without limit, and his eye is never sated with riches. For whom, now, c Lit. "am I amassing...myself." is he amassing it while denying himself -c enjoyment? That too is a futility and an unhappy business.

d 4.9-5.8 consists of a series of observations, each of which is introduced by some slight association with what precedes. The theme of 4.4-8 is not resumed until 5.9. Two are better off than one, in that they have greater e Emendation yields "hope for"; cf. 2.20. benefit from -e their earnings.

For should they fall, one can raise the other; but woe betide him who is alone and falls with no companion to raise him!

Further, when two lie together they are warm; but how can he who is alone get warm?

Also, if one attacks, two can stand up to him. A threefold cord is not readily broken!

Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer has the sense to heed warnings.

For the former can emerge from a dungeon to become king; while the latter, even if born to kingship, can become a pauper. f Taking rash as a verb; cf. Ps. 34.11.

[However,] I reflected about g I.e., "the contemporaries of." all the living who walk under the sun with -g that youthful successor who steps into his place.

Unnumbered are the multitudes of all those who preceded them; h And so never heard of the gifted youth. and later generations will not acclaim him either. i For despite his wisdom, he too will be forgotten; cf. 2.16. For that j I.e., the advantage of wisdom over folly. too is futile and pursuit of wind.

k Lit. "Guard your foot when it [or, you] would go." Be not overeager to go -k to the House of God: more acceptable is obedience than the offering of fools, for they know nothing [but] to do wrong.

Chapter 5

Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your throat a Heb. leb, lit. "heart," sometimes designates the organ of speech; cf. Isa. 33.18; 59.13; Ps. 19.15; 49.4; Job. 8.10. be quick to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; that is why your words should be few.

Just as dreams come with much brooding, so does foolish utterance come with much speech.

When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. For He has no pleasure in fools; what you vow, fulfill.

It is better not to vow at all than to vow and not fulfill.

Don't let your mouth bring you into disfavor, and don't plead before the messenger. ^b Some ancient versions read "God." that it was an error, ^c Moved up from v. 6 for clarity. but fear God; -^c else God may be angered by your talk and destroy your possessions.

^d Meaning of verse uncertain. Emendation yields "Much brooding results in dreams; and much talk in futilities"; cf. v. 2. For much dreaming leads to futility and to superfluous talk.

If you see in a province oppression of the poor and suppression of right and justice, don't wonder at the fact; for one high official is protected by a higher one, and both of them by still higher ones.

Thus the greatest advantage in all the land is his: he controls a field that is cultivated. ^e I.e., the high official profits from the labor of others; but meaning of verse uncertain.

A lover of money never has his fill of money, nor a lover of wealth his fill of income. That too is futile.

As his substance increases, so do those who consume it; what, then, does the success of its owner amount to but feasting his eyes?

A worker's ^f Some ancient versions have "slave's." sleep is sweet, whether he has much or little to eat; but the rich man's abundance doesn't let him sleep.

Here is a grave evil I have observed under the sun: riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune, in that those riches are lost in some unlucky venture; and if he begets a son, he has nothing in hand.

^g Moved up from v. 15 for clarity. Another grave evil is this: He must depart just as he came. -^g As he came out of his mother's womb, so must he depart at last, naked as he came. He can take nothing of his wealth to carry with him.

So what is the good of his toiling for the wind?

Besides, all his days ^h Septuagint reads "are [spent] in darkness and mourning." he eats in darkness, -^h with much vexation and grief and anger.

Only this, I have found, is a real good: that one should eat and drink and get pleasure with all the gains he makes under the sun, during the numbered days of life that God has given him; for that is his portion. Also, whenever a man is given riches and property by God, and is also permitted by Him to enjoy them and to take his portion and get pleasure for his gains—that is a gift of God.

For [such a man] will not brood much over the days of his life, ⁱ The thought of which is depressing; see v. 16. because God keeps him busy enjoying himself.

Chapter 6

There is an evil I have observed under the sun, and a grave one it is for man:

that God sometimes grants a man riches, property, and wealth, so that he does not want for anything his appetite may crave, but God does not permit him to enjoy it; instead, a stranger will enjoy it. That is futility and a grievous ill.

Even if a man should beget a hundred children and live many years—no matter how many the days of his years may come to, if his gullet is not sated through his wealth, I say: The stillbirth, though it was not even accorded a burial, a Stillbirths were cast into pits or hidden in the

ground in no recognizable graves; cf. v. 4 end. is more fortunate than he.

Though it comes into futility and departs into darkness, and its very name is covered with darkness, though it has never seen or experienced the sun, it is better off than he—

yes, even if the other lived a thousand years twice over but never had his fill of enjoyment! For are not both of them bound for the same place?

b Cf. Prov. 16.26. All of man's earning is for the sake of his mouth, c Meaning of Heb. uncertain; emendation yields "And if the gullet is not sated, what advantage has the wise man over the fool, he who knows how to get on in life over the pauper?" yet his gullet is not sated.

What advantage then has the wise man over the fool, what advantage has the pauper who knows how to get on in life? -c

d Meaning of first half of verse uncertain. Is the feasting of the eyes more important than the pursuit of desire? That, too, is futility and pursuit of wind.

Whatever happens, it was designated long ago and it was known that it would happen; as for man, he cannot contend with what is stronger than he.

Often, much talk means much futility. How does it benefit a man?

Who can possibly know what is best for a man to do in life—the few days of his fleeting life? For e Lit. "according to the shadow that"; cf.

Qumran Aramaic betel and Syriac met·t·ol; and see 8.13. who can tell him what the future holds for him under the sun?

Chapter 7

a The author now offers a number of practical maxims, which, however, he concludes (vv. 23-24) are of limited value. A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth. b Until a man dies, there is always danger that he may forfeit his good name.

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting; for that is the end of every man, and a living one should take it to heart.

Vexation is better than revelry; c For empty revelry precludes real happiness; cf. 2.2. for though the face be sad, the heart may be glad. Wise men are drawn to a house of mourning, and fools to a house of merrymaking.

It is better to listen to a wise man's reproof than to listen to the praise of fools.

For the levity d Emendation yields "praise" (shbḥ.) of the fool is like the crackling of nettles under a kettle. e This section, to end of verse 7, is apparently a continuation of the thought in vv. 11-12 and 19. But that too is illusory;

for cheating f Emendation yields "riches." may rob the wise man of reason and destroy the prudence of the cautious. g Lit. "caution"; cf. postbiblical mathun, "cautious."

The end of a matter is better than the beginning of it. Better a patient spirit than a haughty spirit.

Don't let your spirit be quickly vexed, for vexation abides in the breasts of fools.

Don't say, "How has it happened that former times were better than these?" For it is not wise of you to ask that question.

Wisdom is as good as a patrimony, and even better, for those who behold the sun.

For to be in the shelter of wisdom is to be also in the shelter of money, h Emendation yields "For the possessor of wisdom becomes a possessor of money." and the advantage of intelligence is that wisdom preserves the life of him who possesses it.

i Vv. 13-14 continue the thought of v. 10. Consider God's doing! Who can straighten what He has twisted?

So in a time of good fortune enjoy the good fortune; and in a time of misfortune, reflect: The one no less than the other was God's doing; consequently, man may find no fault with Him. j So Rashi; cf. the same thought in Job 1.22; 2.10.

In my own brief span of life, I have seen both these things: sometimes a good man perishes in spite of his goodness, and sometimes a wicked one endures in spite of his wickedness.

So don't overdo goodness and don't act the wise man to excess, or you may be dumfounded.

Don't overdo wickedness and don't be a fool, or you may die before your time.

It is best that you grasp the one without letting go of the other, for one who fears God will do his duty k Cf. postbiblical *yaša yede*. by both. Wisdom is more of a stronghold to a wise man than l Emendation yields "the riches of the magnates"; cf. Prov. 18.11. ten magnates -l that a city may contain.

m Apparently continuing the thought of v. 16. For there is not one good man on earth who does what is best n Refers back to 6.12. and doesn't err.

Finally, don't pay attention to everything that is said, so that you may not hear your slave reviling you;

for well you remember o Lit. "your heart knows"; the same idiom occurs again in 8.5. the many times that you yourself have reviled others.

All this I tested with wisdom. I thought I could fathom it, n Refers back to 6.12. but it eludes me.

[The secret of] what happens is elusive and deep, deep down; who can discover it?

I put my mind to studying, exploring, and seeking wisdom and the reason of things, and to studying wickedness, stupidity, madness, and folly.

Now, I find woman more bitter than death; she is all traps, her hands are fetters and her heart is snares. He who is pleasing to God escapes her, and he who is displeasing is caught by her.

See, this is what I found, said Koheleth, item by item in my search for the reason of things.

As for what I sought further but did not find, I found only one human being in a thousand, and the one I found among so many was never a woman. But, see, this I did find: God made men plain, but they have engaged in too much reasoning.

Chapter 8

a Some ancient versions read "Who here is wise." Who is like the wise man, -a and who knows the meaning of the adage: "A man's wisdom lights up his face, So that his deep discontent b Lit. "face"; cf. 1 Sam. 1.18; Job 9.27. is dissembled"?

I do! "Obey the king's orders-and c Moved up from v. 3 for English word order. don't rush -c into uttering an oath by God." d The answer to the inquiry about the implications of the proverb in v. 1 is given in the form of another proverb, of which only the first half is relevant and is enlarged upon.

e Or "Give ground before him; do not resist." Leave his presence; do not tarry -e in a dangerous situation, for he can do anything he pleases; inasmuch as a king's command is authoritative, and none can say to him, "What are you doing?"

One who obeys orders will not suffer from the dangerous situation. A wise man, however, will bear in mind f The same idiom as in 7.22. that there is a time of doom. g Lit. "time and doom"; cf. the synonymous "time of misfortune," lit. "time and misfortune," 9.11.

For there is a time for every experience, including the doom; for a man's calamity h Still another term for death; cf. "the time of calamity" for "the hour of death," 9.12. overwhelms him.

Indeed, he does not know what is to happen; even when it is on the point of happening, who can tell him?

No man has authority over the lifebreath—to hold back the lifebreath; i From leaving the body when the time comes; see 12.7; cf. Ps. 104.29; 146.4. there is no authority over the day of death. There is no mustering out from that war; wickedness j Emendation yields "riches." is powerless to save its owner.

All these things I observed; I noted all that went on under the sun, while men still had authority over men to treat them unjustly.

And then I saw scoundrels k Meaning uncertain; emendation yields "approaching [to minister]. They would come and profane the Holy Site." coming from the Holy Site and being brought to burial, -k while such as had acted righteously were forgotten in the city. And here is another frustration:

the fact that the sentence imposed for evil deeds is not executed swiftly, which is why men are emboldened to do evil—

the fact that a sinner may do evil a hundred times and his [punishment] still be delayed. For although I am aware that "It will be well with those who revere God since they revere Him,

and it will not be well with the scoundrel, and he will not live long, because l See note on 6.12. he does not revere God"—

here is a frustration that occurs in the world: sometimes an upright man is requited according to the conduct of the scoundrel; and sometimes the scoundrel is requited according to the conduct of the upright. I say all that is frustration.

I therefore praised enjoyment. For the only good a man can have under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy himself. That much can accompany him, in exchange for his wealth, through the days of life that God has granted him under the sun.

For I have set my mind to learn wisdom and to observe the business that goes on in the world—even to the extent of going without sleep day and night—

and I have observed all that God brings to pass. Indeed, man cannot guess the events that occur under the sun. For man tries strenuously, but fails to guess them; and even if a sage should think to discover them he would not be able to guess them.

Chapter 9

For all this I noted, and I ascertained a Meaning of verb uncertain; construction as in Hos. 12.3; Ezra 3.12. all this: that the actions of even the righteous and the wise are determined by God. b Emendation yields "Even love, even hate, no man can know in advance. All 2are insignificant." Even love! Even hate! Man knows none of these in advance—none! -b For the same fate is in store for all: for the righteous, and for the wicked; for the good and pure, c I.e., those who observe the laws of ritual purity. and for the impure; for him who sacrifices, and for him who does not; d Cf. 4.17. for him who is pleasing, e I.e., to God; cf. 2.26; 7.26. and for him who is displeasing; and for him who swears, and for him who shuns oaths. f Cf. 8.2.

That is the sad thing about all that goes on under the sun: that the same fate is in store for all. (Not only that, but men's hearts are full of sadness, and their minds of madness, while they live; and then—to the dead!)

For he who is g Lit. "joined to all." reckoned among -g the living has something to look forward to—even a live dog is better than a dead lion—

since the living know they will die. But the dead know nothing; they have no more recompense, h Emendation yields "hope." for even the memory of them has died.

Their loves, their hates, their jealousies have long since perished; and they have no more share till the end of time in all that goes on under the sun.

Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God. i Cf. 2.24-25; 3.13; 5.18. Let your clothes always be freshly washed, and your head never lack ointment.

Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun—all your fleeting days. For that alone is what you can get out of life and out of the means you acquire under the sun.

Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might. For there is no action, no reasoning, no learning, no wisdom in Sheol, where you are going.

I have further observed under the sun that The race is not won by the swift, Nor the battle by the valiant; Nor is bread won by the wise, Nor wealth by the intelligent, Nor favor by the learned. For the time of mischance j Euphemism for death. comes to all. k I.e., the insignificant duration of life renders all successes illusory; cf. 4.15-16.

And a man cannot even know his time. As fishes are enmeshed in a fatal net, and as birds are trapped in a snare, so men are caught at the time of calamity, j Euphemism for death. when it comes upon them without warning.

This thing too I observed under the sun about wisdom, and it affected me profoundly.

There was a little city, with few men in it; and to it came a great king, who invested it and built mighty siege works against it.

Present in the city was a poor wise man l Others "who saved." who might have saved -l it with his wisdom, but nobody thought of that poor man. So I observed: Wisdom is better than valor; but A poor man's wisdom is scorned, And his words are not heeded.

m Verses 9.17-10.19 constitute a group of loosely connected aphorisms. Words spoken softly by wise men are heeded n Lit. "than the scream of a lord in [the manner of] the fools." sooner than those shouted by a lord in folly. -n

Wisdom is more valuable than o Emendation yields "everything precious." weapons of war, -o but a single error destroys much of value.

Chapter 10

Dead flies turn the perfumer's ointment fetid and putrid; a Meaning of Heb. uncertain. so a little folly outweighs massive wisdom.

A wise man's mind tends toward the right hand, a fool's toward the left. b I.e., a wise man's mind brings him good luck; a fool's brings him bad luck.

A fool's mind is also wanting when he travels, and he lets everybody know he is a fool.

If the wrath of a lord flares up against you, don't give up your post; c Emendation yields "hope." for d Lit. "abatement (2 Chron. 36.16) remits grave offenses." For hinniah, "to remit," cf. Abodah Zarah 13a; cf. hanahah, "remission of taxes," Esth. 2.18. when wrath abates, grave offenses are pardoned. -d

Here is an evil I have seen under the sun as great as an error committed by a ruler:

Folly was placed on lofty heights, while rich men sat in low estate.

I have seen slaves on horseback, and nobles walking on the ground like slaves.

He who digs a pit will fall into it; he who breaches a stone fence will be bitten by a snake.

He who quarries stones will e Emendation yields "profit...shall make use of." be hurt by them; he who splits wood will be harmed by -e it.

f Meaning of verse uncertain. If the ax has become dull and he has not whetted the edge, he must exert more strength. Thus the advantage of a skill [depends on the exercise of] prudence.

If the snake bites because no spell was uttered, no advantage is gained by the trained charmer.

A wise man's talk brings him favor, but a fool's lips are his undoing. His talk begins as silliness and ends as disastrous madness.

Yet the fool talks and talks! g The thought of this sentence is resumed at v. 20. A man cannot know what will happen; who can tell him what the future holds?

h This verse continues the thought of v. 3. A fool's exertions tire him out, for he doesn't know how to get to a town.

Alas for you, O land whose king is a lackey and whose ministers dine in the morning!

Happy are you, O land whose king is a master and whose ministers dine at the proper time—with restraint, not with guzzling!

Through slothfulness the ceiling sags, Through lazy hands the house caves in.

They i I.e., the ministers of v. 16. make a banquet for revelry; wine makes life merry, and money answers every need.

Don't revile a king even among your intimates. j Others "thoughts";

meaning of Heb. uncertain. Don't revile a rich man even in your bedchamber; For a bird of the air may carry the utterance, And a winged creature may report the word.

Chapter 11

Send your bread forth upon the waters; for after many days you will find it.

Distribute portions to seven or even to eight, for you cannot know what misfortune may occur on earth.

If the clouds are filled, they will pour down rain on the earth; and a Emendation yields, "if a thunderbolt (lit. arrow, cf., e.g., 2 Sam. 22.15) falls...where the thunderbolt falls, only there will it strike." if a tree falls to the south or to the north, the tree will stay where it falls. -a

If one watches the wind, he will never sow; and if one observes the clouds, he will never reap.

Just as you do not know how the lifebreath passes into b So many mss. and Targum; most mss. read "like." the limbs within the womb of the pregnant woman, so you cannot foresee the actions of God, who causes all things to happen.

Sow your seed in the morning, and don't hold back your hand in the evening, since you don't know which is going to succeed, the one or the other, or if both are equally good.

How sweet is the light, what a delight for the eyes to behold the sun!

Even if a man lives many years, let him enjoy himself in all of them, remembering how many the days of darkness are going to be. The only future is nothingness!

O youth, enjoy yourself while you are young! Let your heart lead you to enjoyment in the days of your youth. Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes—but know well that God will call you to account for all such things—

and banish care from your mind, and pluck sorrow out of your flesh! For youth and black hair are fleeting.

Chapter 12

So appreciate your vigor a Cf. postbiblical bori; others "Remember thy Creator." in the days of your youth, before those days of sorrow come and those years arrive of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; before sun and light and moon and stars grow dark, and the clouds come back again after the rain:

When the guards of the house b I.e., the arms. become shaky, And the men of valor c I.e., the legs. are bent, And the maids that grind, d I.e., the teeth. grown few, are idle, And the ladies that peer through the windows e I.e., the eyes. grow dim,
And the doors to the street f I.e., the ears. are shut— With the noise of the hand mill growing fainter, And the song of the bird g Exact meaning of Heb. uncertain. growing feebler, -g And all the strains of music dying down; h Cf. 2 Sam. 19.36.

When one is afraid of heights And there is terror on the road.— For the almond tree may blossom, i Emendation yields "The squill (postbiblical Heb. ḥaṣab) resume its burden," i.e., its blossom-stalk and its leaves. The grasshopper be burdened, -i And the caper bush may bud again; j These plants, after seeming dead for part of the year, revive, unlike man; cf. Job 14.7-10. But man sets out for his eternal abode, With mourners all around in the street.—

Before the silver cord snaps And the golden bowl crashes, The jar is shattered at the spring, And the jug k So in Punic; others "wheel." is smashed at the cistern. l Poetic figure for the end of life.
And the dust returns to the ground As it was, And the lifebreath returns to God Who bestowed it.

Utter futility—said Koheleth— All is futile!

A further word: Because Koheleth was a sage, he continued to instruct the people. He listened to and tested the soundness m A noun, like dibber (Jer. 5.13), which occurs in such postbiblical phrases as shanim kethiq(qe)nan, "normal years" (lit. "years according to their propriety"). of many maxims.

Koheleth sought to discover useful sayings and recorded n Wekhathub is equivalent to wekhathob, an infinitive employed as in Esth. 9.16 and elsewhere. genuinely truthful sayings.

The sayings of the wise are like goads, like nails fixed o Meaning of Heb. uncertain. Others "are those that are composed in collections." in prodding sticks. -o p Meaning of Heb. uncertain. Emendation yields "They are accounted as a sharp ox goad" (post-biblical mardea'). They were given by one Shepherd. -p

A further word: q Emendation yields "Slow, there!" Cf. Arabic mah and mah mah; so also mah (meh) in Prov. 31.2. Against them, -q my son, be warned! The making of many books is without limit And much study r Meaning of Heb. uncertain. is a wearying of the flesh.

The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments! For this applies to all mankind:

that God will call every creature to account for s Emendation yields "all their conduct." everything unknown, -s be it good or bad. The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments! For this applies to all mankind.